

LIVING AS A PILGRIM

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Scripture: Philippians 3 and 4

The title I have given for today's meditation is Living as a Pilgrim. So, we'll look at three portions from the book of Philippians, Paul's letter to the Philippian church. And I'll give themes to each of these portions.

I. CITIZENSHIP

Philippians 3:18-21

"¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Looking at this portion, I thought of how God has called each one of us to be a pilgrim. The theme for this portion is Citizenship, especially in the midst of all that is going on. The bible tells us that our permanent citizenship is not wherever we are. That's very important. We all have a dual citizenship. We belong to whichever country we are from. At the same time, we must remember that our permanent citizenship is in heaven.

This particular letter to the Philippian church is a very interesting and wonderful letter. Many scholars say that the church at Philippi must have been the best church, at least for Paul. And so, v.18 comes as a shock. "For as I have often told you before, and now say it again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ." It is shocking to hear that in a church, many are living as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Therefore, it's a warning for all of us what to watch out for in our lives. So, when he's talking about some of them, he's talking about those who started well. But somewhere down the line, their focus changed. And he says that their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. And the real problem is given in the latter part of v.19 which says their mind is on earthly things.

This is something that can happen to us too. I'm sure all of us go through tough times. I believe God has a plan and purpose for each and everything we go through. One very important thing we must always remember is that God is sovereign – everything that happens in the world is in God's control. All that we are going through in our life, God has allowed it. If that's the case, then each and every difficulty or challenge we are going through, even the good things that we are going through, God is shaping and forming us so that we will be able to accomplish God's plan for our life.

It is very important for each and every one of us to remember that God has a plan and a purpose for each one of us. And God will not tell us today that this is the purpose. But at the end of your life, you'll be able to see that, through God's grace, you've been able to fulfill that purpose. God uses everything that happens in our life to shape us, to form us, to mold us. But God will not force us. God's spirit is there to guide us, but He will not force us.

This is what is so sad. Some of them, as they went through their Christian life, became enemies of the cross of Christ. It all starts with the mind. Where is our mind? What are the things which are important for us? always remember, we need to keep our focus on God. And that's exactly what he's trying to say here.

I like the way it's put in v.20 – "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they'll be like His glorious body."

We must remember that we ultimately are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Therefore that should be our ultimate focus and our ultimate aim in life. Unless we have that kind of perspective, when we are bombarded with problems, ups and downs that occur, we can completely lose focus. And what happened to some at the church at Philippi, can happen to us. And we can slowly, slowly drift. Sometimes it is very difficult to figure out how much we have drifted. But even a few angles can be enough to move us far away down the line. Therefore, watch out! Check where your mind is. Are you getting entangled with the things of the world? Maybe problems, maybe genuine concerns, maybe studies, a profession? But is that the primary thing in your life? That's something we need to watch out for.

So that's the first thing I want to encourage all of you – to think about your citizenship. That's why we are living as pilgrims; we are not going to be here forever. We don't even know whether we'll live tomorrow. We are not permanent citizens of this world. Our permanent citizenship is actually in heaven, and that thought should rule us.

II. REJOICING IN THE MIDST OF ANXIETIES

Philippians 4: 4-9

"⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

This particular letter is very often called the letter of joy, because in every chapter, you will find the word rejoice. And Paul is writing it from prison, and that too from a Roman dungeon. It was very unlike modern-day prisons where the prisoners have a lot of rights and a fairly easy life. but the Roman dungeon was terrible. And from there, Paul says to rejoice in the Lord always. And he says, "Again, I will say it again, rejoice." The point he is making is this: Right now I am in prison. But that does not define my joy. My joy is because my citizenship is in heaven."

Then he says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." Sometimes when we go through tough times, we get irritated. We show our true selves to those who are close to us, or maybe even everybody. That is why he says, "Let your gentleness be known to all."

Another wonderful verse in this book of Philippians is 1:27, "Whatever happens in your life, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the Lord." I think that nicely synchronizes with this particular verse.

So, as we go through tough times, let our gentleness be known to all. Then he adds, “The Lord is near.” Why? the Lord is near.

Then comes this beautiful practical down-to-earth precious verse: “⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Just now, he said rejoice in the Lord always. And then he’s getting into down-to-earth practical. “Do not be anxious about anything.” Everything is covered under that word and sentence. But then, what to do? That is the very next part. “But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.”

So what should we do when we go through tough times, when we go through difficult times? First, don’t be anxious. Why? Because that’s not going to solve the problem anyway. And Jesus also said this in Matthew 6: None of us are going to solve any problem by being anxious. So what should we do? In everything – that means from the smallest to the biggest. We all go to God when we have tough times. But do we go to Him in the small things? He says, “In everything, whether it’s big or small, in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God.”

If you look at the prayers which we see in the Old Testament, or even in some of the Psalms, you see a good pattern. It doesn’t start by saying: Lord, this is the problem, 1,2,3, and so on. No. It always starts by asserting: Lord, in the past, You have always been a good, faithful, loving God. And he narrates. I’m sure that whoever prayed there, is not educating God. He is reminding himself that the God to who I am praying was faithful in the life of Israel. Faithful in my life. Reminding myself before even putting out my request. I think that’s the right way. When we pray, first think about all that God has done in your life, that God has done in others’ lives. And then, put your request. That’s why he is saying, “But in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God.”

We might be tempted to think that when we pray, God will answer the way we want to get it answered. But look at v.7: “⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” What is promised here is God’s peace. God’s presence. God has heard. And God would answer it best as He things best.

In this context, let me read another very important portion which we read during the first service. I think it would remind us what kind of God we are serving. And when we are praying, to whom are we praying.

Isaiah 43:1-4

“**43** But now, this is what the Lord says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
²When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.
³For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your stead.
⁴Since you are precious and honored in my sight,
and because I love you,
I will give people in exchange for you,
nations in exchange for your life.”

When we pray, we must remember that we are praying to an almighty God, a sovereign God, and the God who created not just us but the whole universe just by one word. Very difficult especially for all of us living in this scientific world. But that’s exactly what we need to do. We need to tell ourselves: I am praying to an almighty God, an eternal God, the One who created me. And, as Paul said, God has heard me. And all that I need, as we saw in the portion from Isaiah, is god says, “I will be with you.” That’s all we need. You can be sure about that.

We see this promise again and again in the New Testament. I will be with you. And God’s spirit is a permanent resident with all of us. We are much more privileged than the Old Testament men and women. We are very fortunate because we have God’s spirit with us all the time. So, God’s spirit is with us and that should keep us going.

Then in Philippians 4:8-9

“⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

He had just said, “Don’t be anxious about anything.” But now he has given us a long list of things to be thinking about. Whenever the Bible says, “Don’t do something,” it immediately adds what to do. And here is a long list. I always found it very difficult to follow the logic behind all this. In a given situation, we can find out whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, and if there is anything excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

When we talked about citizenship, the problem there was the mind. Here again, a solution is in the mind. What are we thinking about? What are we anxious about. Are we allowing that anxiety to rule us or are we willing to trust God and willing to think about things.

And the beautiful end of v.9 says, “And the God of peace will be with you.” I think that’s all that you need. I think that we need to remember, remind ourselves all the time. You don’t need anything more than that. God’s presence is all that you need.

And God knows. As we said in the beginning, if God is sovereign, and if God knows everything that’s going through my life – not only my life, everything is controlled by God – then God is using all the situations to mold me to be the person I need to be, so that ultimately I’ll be able to fulfil God’s purpose for my life. That’s the perspective we need to have all the time, that God has a purpose for my life and therefore I need to surrender myself to God to all Him to mold me to fulfil that purpose. At the end of your life, like Paul, we’ll be able to say that I have run the race well. On our own, we cannot do it. But by God’s grace we can do it.

III. THE EXAMPLE OF APOSTLE PAUL

Philippians 4:10-13

“¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

Now having said all this, Paul is quoting his life. And he is quoting his example. Today, when we think about the ministry or working for God’s kingdom, very often in Christian circles we use the term full-time worker. What we mean by that is somebody who is devoting his or her entire life for God’s work, ministry, preaching or teaching or whatever it is. God’s ministry.

But we also have another term called tent-maker. And that came from Paul’s life. In 1 Corinthians 9, he says that God has commanded us that those who preach the gospel should live also through the gospel, meaning those whom the preacher or the pastor is serving, they should take care. Then he immediately adds: “But I didn’t want to take that freedom. I consider it a privilege to work and to support myself and also to support others.”

From Paul’s profession, the word tent-maker came. He did that for a living, and not only that, he took care of others. I am sure there were times when he didn’t have time. If you look at the way Paul conducted his ministry, especially in Acts, you would find that he had extremely difficult time. maybe there were times he didn’t have time and he was worried about his food. Maybe that’s why he said in v.11 “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstance. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

Paul is saying, “I know the secret.” 2 Corinthians 6 gives us the long list of things he has gone through. What he wanted to say was that he had a taste of everything. Hungry, well-fed, all that. And he says, “The secret is this,” and gives it in v.13, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

I think that’s the lesson we need to learn from his life – living a life of content. Whatever God has given me, whether it’s hunger or plenty, difficulty, whatever it is, I can do it. because God has allowed. God is sovereign. Therefore, God allows everything that we go through. And God is using it. God knows. And Paul says I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. That is the secret of his life. And I believe that should be our secret too – that whatever God allows, surrendering, trusting God, allowing God so that God can shape us and mold us the way we need to be.

SUMMARY:

1. We have dual citizenship. We are citizens of our own countries, and God has given us things to do. We need to do it faithfully and bring glory and honor to God. But we must remember that we should not get caught up in the daily affairs. We need to be careful whether our minds are on heavenly things.

And we must remember that our permanent citizenship is in heaven. Therefore, that should rule us all the time. we should have the mind of a pilgrim. We are not permanent residents of this place. That should rule us all the time when we go through all situations.

2. Paul said rejoice. And he also said don't be anxious about everything. It's not that we will not have problems; we won't have anxiety. But he says, "Instead, go to God with thanksgiving. Bring your petitions to God and the promise of God's peace ruling us."

Again we saw from the book of Isaiah, God said I will be with you. Don't be afraid, I am going to be with you. And in v.9 it says the God of peace will be with you. That's all the more true because God's spirit is a permanent resident. God's spirit is with us all the time.

3. Paul exposed his own life. he showed us the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well-fed or hungry. He said: The secret is this – I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. So, may the Lord help us to live as men and women of His calling and allow God to shape us and mold us to be the man or woman God wants us to be.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day. Thank You Lord because we are Your children. Thank You for this great privilege because we are children of the most high God. We pray that as we live in this world, as we go through tough times, as we go through all kinds of difficult challenges, that we'll remember that You are in control. So, help us to remember that You are using all that we are going through to mold us into the person whom You want us to be.

Lord, we pray that we'll always remember. Thank you Lord, for this wonderful assurance that we can do everything through Christ who strengthens us. thank You Lord, for making us Your children and help us to live in that kind of a relationship always.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
